

USAID INSIGHT

PARLIAMENT ADOPTS GENDER ANALYSIS TO ENSURE EQUAL RIGHTS FOR MEN AND WOMEN

On September 8, 2005, Ukraine's Parliament (The Verkhovna Rada) adopted "The Law on Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men." Just over a year later, in November 2006, the Secretary General of the Verkhovna Rada Secretariat established a designated officer in each parliamentary committee to serve as equal rights and opportunities representative. These were two big steps for the Ukrainian legislature in adopting a new gender approach and embracing new concepts.

When Olena Suslova accepted the position of Gender Activities Coordinator in USAID's Parliamentary Development Program (PDP) in 2003, she did not expect immediate results. Moreover, given her knowledge of the Ukrainian Parliament, she was almost convinced that most of her efforts in advancing gender concepts would be futile in this still, in many ways, post-Soviet institution. Olena had worked in the NGO sector since 1989, and felt she knew all the opportunities and drawbacks of civil society institutions. With state institutions, introduction of new concepts and changing the way they work seemed more challenging and difficult.

However, this very challenge was one of the reasons she joined PDP. First, she started to work with committee staff; they turned out to be highly

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History: International Women's Day



Finnish, Swedish and British women marching in a Suffragette parade in Brooklyn, New York

The idea of an International Women's Day first arose at the turn of the century, which in the industrialized world was a period of expansion and turbulence, booming population growth and radical ideologies. *International Women's Day* marks a celebration of the economic, social, cultural and political achievements of women.

The first *International Women's Day* was held on March 19, 1911 in Germany, Austria, Denmark and several other European countries. German women selected this date because in 1848 the Prussian king had promised the vote to women.

Over one million leaflets calling for action on the right to vote were distributed throughout Germany before *International Women's Day* in 1911. Now *International Women's Day* is always celebrated on March 8 and is an occasion marked by women's groups around the world. This date is also commemorated at the United Nations and is designated in many countries, including Ukraine, as a national holiday.

Women in many countries, often divided by ethnic, linguistic, cultural, economic and political differences, come together to celebrate this important date that represents equality, justice, peace and development.

HEALTH WORKERS BRING FAMILY PLANNING TO PRIMARY CARE

Until recently, Ukrainian women requiring family planning and reproductive health (FP/RH) care had to go to obstetrician-gynecologists (ob-gyns), who are usually located in town and cities. This was difficult for many, especially those living in rural areas. USAID's *Together for Health* project set out to change the situation. By training ob-gyns as well as family doctors and mid-level health workers, the project expanded FP/RH services to the primary health care level. The training, now taking place in 13 oblasts in Ukraine, has expanded the range of health workers who are able to provide FP/RH care, increasing access to family planning services in local communities.

When USAID's *Together for Health* (TfH) initiated trainings in 2006, only 293 health facilities in seven oblasts provided FP/RH services. Two years later, this number has tripled, and it continues to grow. Family doctors, internists, midwives and

feldshers (nurse practitioners) are now trained to provide FP/RH services, which has increased access, especially for women in semi-urban and rural areas. In Kharkiv Oblast alone, the number of facilities offering FP/RH has skyrocketed from 58 in 2006 to more than 250 in the beginning of 2009. Most of that expansion has occurred in the areas outside of the oblast and rayon centers.

Family doctors, internists, midwives and feldshers (nurse practitioners) are now trained to provide FP/RH services, which has increased access for everybody, but especially for women in semi-urban and rural areas.

TfH clinical trainings are designed to help health professionals better understand the concepts of client-centered care, family planning counseling and modern contraceptive technology. So far, the trainings have successfully accomplished their goal of bringing FP/RH closer to people. Nikolai Faida, a family doctor working in Komsomolsk, Poltava Oblast, has included more comprehensive family planning services into his practice after he attended a TfH training. His 1,900 patients, out of which more than 1,200 are women of reproductive age, can now

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When a Woman Helps a Woman in Need

Oleksandra Kyrychenko, the Head of the Veterans' Union, is a highly respected and well-known elderly woman in her village of Lyutenski Budyshcha, which is in Poltava region. Her villagers look up to her, but her husband does not. For many years, Oleksandra had been returning home not knowing how she would be greeted by her husband, or where she would be spending the night – at her own home or her sister's. Over time, Oleksandra had lost all hope, but the tide finally turned when her friend, Hanna Skarha, invited her to participate in a seminar to learn about legal rights and protection.

The lack of legal protection of rural residents, and women in particular, is one of the most alarming and frequently overlooked problems in Ukraine. Rural women's rights to have access to employment, equal pay for equal work, and an equal access to education, information and medical services is continually

and widely violated. Although legally entitled to ownership rights in land plots, women – of whom elderly women comprise the absolute majority – cannot or do not know how to enforce their ownership rights. And, even if they are lucky to be land owners, they often face acute legal problems related to land use and operation rights for agricultural activity. In addition, women and children are the most frequent victims of domestic violence during difficult economic times.

For many years, it has been the deepest desire of Hanna Skarha, who heads the Poltava Regional Branch of the *Union of Rural Women of Ukraine*, to help rural residents, especially women, address these problems. She was vocal in protecting the rights of women like Oleksandra Kyrychenko at the Public Women's Parliament of Ukraine and in the Public Councils on Gender and Agrarian Issues. A veterinary technician by profession, she always wanted to become a lawyer. So, after seeing

a call for applications from USAID's *ABA Rule of Law Initiative*, she seized this opportunity to advocate for rights of rural women. As Hanna says, she has "put all her heart into the project." And her efforts have not been in vain.

With financial support received from USAID's *ABA Rule of Law Initiative* Hanna held seven seminars on land law, domestic violence, and other issues, in which 525 residents from 10 villages learned about their rights and the legal avenues available to protect and enforce those rights. One hundred fifteen of those villagers are now certified by the Poltava Regional Branch of the *Union of Rural Women of Ukraine* as public defenders and can provide consultations and advice on many of the most pertinent and pressing issues impacting rural life, as well as advocate for those issues before judicial, executive and local governmental bodies.

The empowerment that these women feel by taking control of their lives and advocating see **LEGAL PROTECTION**, p. 4

Family Doctors Counsel on Reproductive Health Issues

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receive qualified information and services from their family doctor close to home instead of traveling to the rayon hospital for these services. Particularly useful for Faida — and beneficial to his clients — was the information on contraceptive methods,

including oral and emergency contraception, and voluntary surgical sterilization. Since he started consulting his patients, he noticed an increase in the use of modern contraceptive methods in his area. "I work with some women who have been using traditional methods for 20 years," he explains, "and now they have chosen

to switch to modern methods. My practice is a perfect place for women of any age to receive information about family planning, because they come for advice before they have serious problems. I am now doing all I can to make sure everyone knows about and can use the method that she chooses."

Antonina Perepelets, a family doctor from Zhokva, Lviv Oblast, is also satisfied with the enhancements in her practice. She remarks that counseling techniques she learned during the training are helping her, especially in her work with adolescent women. "I didn't really know how to talk to teenagers about these issues," she

explains, "but they are such an important group for family planning and safe sex practices. After the training I felt like I could better address their needs." The information she received about oral contraceptives was especially helpful for her. It revealed that many of her own fears about hormonal contraception were unfounded, and she

now feels well prepared to discuss this option with women of any age. She says that she "sees more than ever the crucial preventative role that primary care physicians play in family planning and helping to promote a healthy next generation."

A major part of family planning is providing information and counseling so that women and men

can reach their own decisions about whether to use contraception and, if so, the best method to use. The T4H trainings have already provided about 3,500 health professionals around the country with the information necessary to guide their patients through the contraceptive decision-making process. With family doctors like Faida and Perepelets providing FP/RH counseling and services, Ukrainian women receive accurate information and services from new sources. As more and more women of reproductive age get access to quality FP/RH services from primary health care workers, Ukraine is getting one step closer, as Perepelets puts it, to "a healthier future."



Antonina Perepelets counsels a woman from Zhovkva in family planning methods (Photo by I. Dzioba)

Promoting Informed Choice for Women through Education at Work Place

Reproductive health and family planning remains a sensitive topic, and the right medium and appropriate environment are extremely important for discussing it effectively.

Lack of information can lead to misinformation about family planning and modern methods of contraception among the population of Ukraine. It is particularly complicated to target training and education efforts to working women, whose time is divided between work and family. Nonetheless, Ukrainian women in the workforce are still in need of family planning information and support to make informed decisions about their health.

USAID's *Together for Health* project has devised innovative ways to bring health messages to population that are hard to reach. Last year, with support from USAID's *Together for Health* project, Dr. Nina Durdukulieva, Chief Doctor of Poltava Oblast Health Center, conducted a series of educational workshops on family planning at two factories for working women in Poltava that have been met with great success.

The two factories in which Dr. Durdukulieva delivered training could not have been more different. The garment factory *Vorskla*, where 600 out of 650 employees are women, has an upbeat and modern work environment, which reflects the factory's occupation - making fashionable clothes for women in Ukraine and Western Europe. At the *Dominique* confectionery, which employs 2,000 people, work requires little innovation or interaction between workers. "Similarity among these locations is that women working there share similar family experiences and health concerns," Dr. Durdukulieva explains.

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Manual on Legislative Support of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men Helps Adopt Gender-Balanced Approaches to Lawmaking



MP Olena Bondarenko, MP Leonid Hrach (center) and MP Mykola Tomenko, at the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Human Rights, National Minorities, and Inter-ethnic Relations, hearing September 21, 2006. (Photo: Courtesy of PDP)

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dedicated professionals who were willing to embrace new ideas. She found out that despite a seminar on gender issues in which many of them had participated, they did not fully understand new concepts and did not agree with them. When someone would confront her dismissively with the challenge, "I don't agree with 'this gender thing' of yours," she would usually reply back in a joking tone: "Tell me what exactly it is about my gender that you don't agree with, and maybe I will find that I don't agree with it either!" This response was usually followed by a conversation in which she could really discuss the basic concepts and purpose of gender analysis with them again. This approach quickly bore fruit.

The committee staff representatives soon turned into a team of

highly qualified specialists in gender issues. The principal task that united them was the production of the *Manual on Legislative Support of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men* (www.pdp.org.ua/files/zakonotv_rivni_prava.pdf). Committee and parliament division staff, civil society organizations, international organizations and the Ukrainian expert community contributed to the manual.

The manual turned to be a success. It was reprinted it several times. Olena Bondarenko, a member of the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Human Rights, National Minorities, and Inter-ethnic Relations noted: "This publication, without a doubt, was a turning point in understanding gender issues by Parliament Members and staff. With its help they became well-versed in gender terminology and adopted gender-balanced approaches to lawmaking in their everyday work."

After the publication of the manual, the next step in this process was to have a staff person assigned in each committee who would consult and provide support on gender-related and equal opportunities issues in the area of the committee's jurisdiction. A well-formulated idea brings one only halfway to its successful implementation. Olena Bondarenko brought this idea before Chairman of the Parliament Oleksandr Moroz who, in the wake of parliamentary hearings in November 2006 "On Equal Rights and Opportunities in Ukraine: Realities and Prospects," gave a green light to its implementation on the level of the parliament's secretariat.

And so it happened that the Ukrainian parliament, even before national and regional executive agencies, implemented provisions of the 2005 Law on Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men.

Time passes, but the group of these officers that we now call Gender Focal Points is still active. USAID's PDP-II continues to seek ways to help support these specialists in applying gender analysis and developing gender policy in a professional and effective manner. The group has been expanded now to include Gender Focal Points in each ministry. One of the new ideas suggested to implement during this year is the introduction of a Gender Advisor to the parliament's leadership, and the project is working on a strategy to ensure the effectiveness of that effort.

POLTAVA WOMEN LEARN ABOUT MODERN FAMILY PLANING METHODS

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Armed with FP/RH expertise and innovative adult learning strategies that Dr. Durdukulieva learned at a USAID's Family Planning training, she was able to overcome the challenges of maintaining her participants' attention after a long workday, and she was able to successfully engage the audience on a sometimes-taboo topic.

Dr. Durdukulieva's interactive and creative sessions were received very positively. Women of different ages and backgrounds expressed their opinions and feelings openly, generating genuine discussion on important health-related topics. "Perhaps the most amazing thing was to see the transformation of participants," Dr. Durdukulieva shared. "Many of them admitted that they had never heard the term family planning, and that they were not aware of many existing modern methods of contraception." After the first few workshops, Dr. Durdukulieva had her hands full as word spread through the factories and attendance increased significantly. Even the management,

at first skeptical of the program, requested that the sessions continue.

The workshops covered topics ranging from anatomy to family planning, from healthy lifestyle choices to HIV and STI prevention. The participants were most interested, however, in

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Olena, a 23-year-old garment worker

the various types of available contraception. According to Natalia Karbowska, TfH Deputy Director, "most of the participants' questions had to do with birth control pills or emergency contraception, because there is still a lot of misinformation about these products in Ukraine," "But," she adds, "we also had many questions about the calendar method, Intrauterine De-

vices, and prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections."

Olena, a 23-year-old garment worker who attended one of the first workshops said: "It was very good to hear that I have choices, and that I am responsible for making the right choice for me. Of course, I had already learned some of this information in university or from friends, but it helped so much to hear it again now that I am older and have a boyfriend. And it was great to learn it with my coworkers, who, like me, received answers to many questions we have had."

Dr. Durdukulieva was most impressed by the commitment that the women showed to learning about their own health. "The fact that so many women were willing to stay after work or use their lunch break to learn about family planning illustrates to me how important such information is to women," she explains. Thanks to her work and the interest and dedication of the factory workers themselves, more than 500 women in Poltava are now equipped with the knowledge and confidence to take control of their own reproductive health and family planning decisions.

FROM A VICTIM OF TRAFFICKING TO A BUSINESS WOMAN



In a hair-dressing studio (Photo courtesy of Revival of the Nation NGO, Ternopil)

The story of Yulia (name changed), a Ukrainian woman, who became a victim of trafficking, is similar to others. Unlike many other stories that involve trafficking, this one has a happy ending.

In 2004, Yulia was looking for a job and was offered employment in Poland to take care of an elderly couple. In Poland, “the couple” turned out to be a family of four – Mr. X, his disabled wife who could not walk, and their two children. On the first working day, the head of the family informed Yulia about her duties and responsibilities. Much to her surprise, Yulia learned that not only she was supposed to take care of the man’s wife, but she was also responsible for all household chores. The man promised to pay her extra for that. Next, he took away Yulia’s passport, explaining that it was needed to obtain a work permit. He also told her not to leave the house, because if she got caught working without a permit, he, as her employer, would be penalized.

Working for the family turned out to be difficult and emotionally draining.

The children were disobedient, and Yulia was constantly cleaning up after them. Once she asked the children to collect their toys, and in return their father beat her.

After a few months of hard work, Yulia asked for the money that she had been promised but had never received. The man lost his temper, and beat and raped her. Yulia was told that she did not deserve any additional payment, as she was already paid with food and accommodation. Violence and rapes became regular; and Yulia could not leave the house. Every time the man left the house, he locked her in the room with the wife. Finally, Yulia could not tolerate this situation any longer – she told the wife about the rapes. The wife demanded to dismiss Yulia immediately. The man beat and raped Yulia one more time, but eventually let her go. She got her passport back with a small amount of money that would only cover a bus ticket to go home.

Back in Ukraine, Yulia received comprehensive assistance from a local NGO and the *International Organization for Migration (IOM)* Mission in Ukraine under the Reintegration Assistance to Victims of Trafficking Program supported by USAID. She went through psychological counseling and the necessary medical treatment at the IOM Medical Rehabilitation Center, which included medical tests, free medications, as well as board and lodging. She also received a reintegration grant and support from the NGO in her home town.

In 2007, Yulia decided to start her own business. She had a sound business idea and all the necessary professional skills. What Yulia lacked, however, was a business plan and a start-up capital.

After completing a business skills course that was provided by the IOM, Yulia received initial capital of about \$2,500 to open a small hair-dressing studio. She also took out a bank loan to decorate and furnish her studio before its grand opening.

The studio turned out to be a success. The business quickly expanded, and today Yulia employs one worker and two interns. Yulia gained a good reputation and a loyal group of clients, many of whom come to her studio every month.

As a socially responsible person, Yulia also effectively contributes to the community development. Her studio supports fund-raising events by providing free services on the *Day of Disabled People* or on the *Child Protection Day*. Yulia also has a group of retired elderly clients, to whom she provides free services regularly. A discount of 50% is available to low-income clients.

Despite the financial crisis, Yulia’s business continues to grow, and she is making plans to expand.

Rural Residents Learn How To Enforce Their Legal Rights

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for their rights is a reward for Hanna Skarha’s work. However, she believes that a more tangible result was the creation of the Legal Protection Center in Zin’kiv district in Poltava Oblast. The Center serves as a hub for training and supporting public defender offices in the 10 most distant villages of the district. These same 10 villages have also received specialized legal libraries and computers as additional resources available to them. The lawyers of the Center provided 632 legal consultations on a pro bono basis. Eighteen cases have been won in the courts, and 16 cases advanced through state executive bodies.

Oleksandra Kyrychenko came to one of these seminars as a battered woman. Now, due to the information and support she received through the Union of Rural Women of Ukraine, the local militia have begun to take her complaints more seriously, and she finally has peace at home. Her husband has renewed respect for her and may be a little in awe of this new self-assured woman in his house. This is one of the many great things that can happen when a woman helps a woman in need.



Hanna Skarha, the Head of the Poltava Regional Chapter of the Union of Rural Women of Ukraine, opens a legal seminar. (Photo: courtesy of ABA-ROLI)